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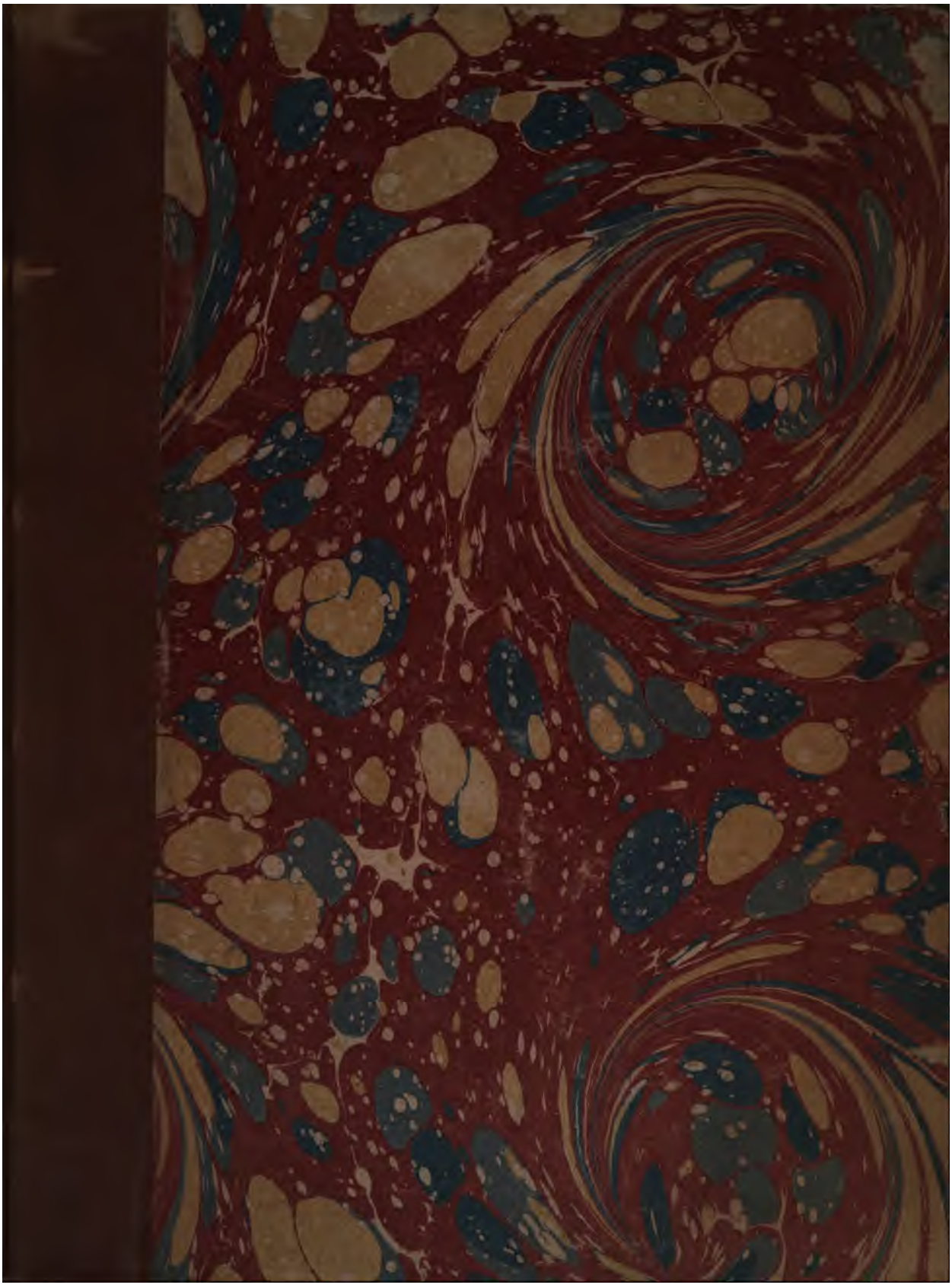

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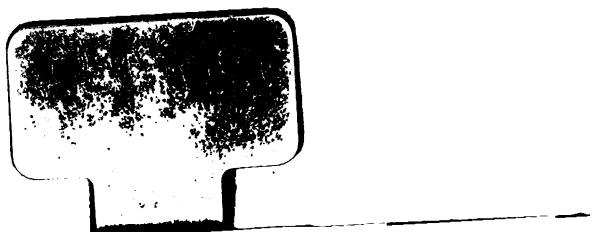

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

Vincent Brooks, lith.

croyez moi avec
les sentimens les plus
vrais.
Leopold

MEMOIR

OF

LEOPOLD THE FIRST,

KING OF THE BELGIANS.

BY

NESTOR CONSIDÉRANT.

TRANSLATED BY SPECIAL PERMISSION FROM THE 'INDÉPENDANCE BELGE.'

WITH A PORTRAIT,

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY C. BAUGNIET, SPECIAL ARTIST TO THE LATE KING.

73

LONDON:
ALFRED IVE, 13, BURLEIGH STREET, STRAND.
1865.

240. e. 78.

KING LEOPOLD THE FIRST.

NEVER has a prince more nobly fulfilled a career, distinguished by the greatest actions, than the King whose loss Belgium, overwhelmed with grief, now deplores. It is difficult, in the presence of his tomb, to be sufficiently self-possessed not to give way to the grief which afflicts a whole people, and to recall the events of a life which was illustrious even among the most illustrious on record. But the highest homage that can be paid to the memory of King Leopold will be to preserve, while lamenting him, the calmness which he himself exhibited to the last hour of his existence. Belgium will not fail to appreciate the great moral of his life, and when considering it, the love will be strengthened which she entertains for his dynasty, and for the Prince upon whom the hopes of all now depend,—a Prince who, while displaying upon the throne the possession of the rarest qualities, will have the happy fortune of finding everything traced out for him by paternal example.

Leopold, Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, son of Duke Frederick and the Duchess Augusta-Caroline-Sophia of Reuss-Ehersdorff, was born at Coburg, the 16th December, 1790. The princely House to which he belonged was one of the most ancient and illustrious in Germany, deriving its origin

from that of the first Margraves of Misnia, it had the honour of giving princes to Germany, whose names became celebrated in history, such as Frederick the Wise, two Kings of Poland, and the chivalrous Marshal de Saxe, who commanded the French at Fontenoy. But glorious as was its destiny in former times, it was nothing in comparison to that which the future reserved for the House of Saxe-Coburg.

Happy alliances had united the princes of this House to the principal royal families of Europe, and it was the Emperor Leopold II., son of Maria-Theresa, who gave his name to the future sovereign of Belgium. From his earliest years, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg possessed that clearness of intelligence and sagacious judgment which distinguished him all his life; and a well-directed education made him one of the most accomplished Princes in Europe. The languages of antiquity and those of modern times, law, literature, science, and art, were equally studied by him; while the great events which were then occurring in Europe added to this wide range of knowledge that of the art of war, and what is even more precious for a prince, the experience derived from an acquaintance with illustrious men and the momentous affairs in which they were engaged.

Immediately after the death of his august father (on the 9th December, 1806), and the occupation of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg by the troops of Napoleon, Prince Leopold entered the service of Russia, over which Alexander I. then reigned. The great intelligence of Alexander quickly discerned and appreciated the rare merits of the young Duke of Saxe, who, in the capacity of a general officer, accompanied the Czar, in 1807, to the interview with Napoleon at Erfurt. Shortly afterwards, in obedience to a political necessity, he quitted the Russian service, and repaired, towards the end of 1807, to Paris, where he contracted an intimate friendship with Queen Hortense. The disasters of the Rus-

sian campaign having given rise to the formation of another European coalition against the Emperor Napoleon, Leopold resumed command of his brigade of Russian cuirassiers, at whose head he distinguished himself by his prudence and valour at the battle of Bautzen. He equally distinguished himself at Dresden, Persia, Peterswald, and Culm, where he largely contributed to the defeat of General Vandamme, who, with Generals Guyot and Haxo, was taken prisoner of war; as well as at the battles of Gersdorf, Wahlden, Limbach, Etzdorf, Waschau, and Leipzig. Such were the services during the memorable campaign of 1813, of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, for whom they obtained two of the most illustrious orders of chivalry in Europe, those of Saint George and Maria-Theresa.

Next followed the campaign of 1814, in which Leopold acquired new claims to admiration from all military men. At Brienne, Arcis-sur-Aube, and La Fère-Champenoise, he gave fresh proof of that valour which had already entitled him to rank among the bravest of soldiers. The campaign having terminated with the entry of the allies into Paris, the Prince accompanied the Emperor Alexander to the Court of England, where he was presented to the Princess Charlotte, daughter of the Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV., and of the Princess Charlotte-Amelia of Wolfenbüttel. The youthful Princess, who was as remarkable for intelligence and gracefulness as for the beauty of her person, made a profound impression upon Leopold, who, however, shortly afterwards, was obliged to leave London, in order to defend, at the Congress of Vienna, the rights of the House of Saxe-Coburg. On the return of Napoleon from the island of Elba he was still in the Austrian capital, and he was about to rejoin, on the banks of the Rhine, his corps of cavalry, when the news of the battle of Waterloo resounded all over Europe.

The re-establishment of peace in Europe enabled Prince Leopold to accomplish the projects which he had formed for his future happiness. After a short stay in Paris, he received almost simultaneously, while on a journey to Berlin, the freedom of the City of London, which had been conferred upon him by the Corporation of that great city, and a formal message by which the Prince Regent of England informed him that his union with the Princess Charlotte had received the consent of Parliament. This marriage, which placed Prince Leopold upon the steps of one of the greatest thrones in the world, and which seemed to be the prelude to the most brilliant and happy destiny, was celebrated at Carlton House, on the 2nd of May, 1816, amidst the enthusiastic acclamations of the whole nation. The English Parliament upon this occasion voted to Prince Leopold, in addition to the domain of Claremont, £50,000 a year, which, with a degree of scrupulousness as disinterested as it was delicate, he relinquished from the day that he was nominated King of the Belgians. Leopold also received the title of Royal Highness and the grade of Field-Marshal.

But this picture of extreme happiness was soon succeeded by one of grief and mourning: of so many delightful promises nothing soon remained but the memory, and the bitter regret of the past. The Princess Charlotte gave birth to a still-born child, and died herself some hours afterwards, on the 6th of November, 1817. There are many who yet remember the consternation which this fatal and double event spread throughout Great Britain: the whole nation shared the affliction of Prince Leopold, who sought in retirement and study to assuage his grief. The sympathy of all England followed him to his residence at Claremont; and the Prince Regent still further testified the profound esteem which he entertained for him, by conferring upon him, with the title of Prince Royal, the right of taking the arms of Great

Britain, and making him a Privy Councillor. Not long afterwards, new ties united him still more closely to the royal family of England; for, on the 11th of July, 1818, his sister married the Duke of Kent, and became the mother of the Princess Victoria.

But a still greater future soon opened itself to Prince Leopold. Europe had long known that he was one of those rare beings whose talents, character, and bent of mind naturally make them the leaders of a people; and in the midst of the political complications of an age labouring at its own transformation, all eyes were incessantly directed towards him. As far as Leopold was concerned, he had sought to soothe his sorrows by applying himself to the study of social and political questions; and the meditation of the institutions and manners of all civilized nations had imbued his just and well-balanced mind with the spirit of the true laws upon which modern society is based, and enabled him to penetrate to their foundation the conditions of the existence and the advantages of constitutional governments, founded on the three great principles of order, progress, and liberty. He was thus fully prepared for whatever might happen, and was worthy of the highest destiny, when the movement took place which resulted in the freedom of Greece.

The people of Greece, recently liberated, and under the protection of the Great Powers of Europe, were in want of a King; and the Governments of France, Russia, and Great Britain naturally addressed themselves to Prince Leopold, to whom an official communication was addressed on the subject, early in the month of February, 1830. Without allowing himself to be dazzled by the offer of a crown, Leopold desired before all things to acquire exact information as to the state of public opinion in Greece, and of the degree of favour with which the combination proposed by the Great Powers would be received in that country. On the other

hand, and without even waiting to be enlightened on this first point, he declared that the acceptation of the crown did not appear to him compatible with his dignity, unless the European Conference consented to enter into definite engagements concerning the future limits of Greece; the financial assistance which would enable him to tide over a period of trial always fruitful in crises; and the guarantee of an armed occupation, to be enabled, in case of necessity, to repel foreign aggression. The Conference, not thinking itself able to grant these demands, however reasonable they might be, and the information personally obtained by Leopold, having, on the other hand, shown him that his election to the throne of Greece would not be received with that spontaneous and national approval which he justly deemed indispensable, he declined, in a letter, dated the 24th of May, 1830, to accept the high mission with which it was sought to invest him.

That letter, which is one of the best titles Leopold possesses to the admiration of posterity, is eminently characteristic of him both as a man and a politician; it is, as it were, the programme of the whole of his future life. It reveals to us, at the same time, the philosopher who knows what is due to the dignity of a people, and the prince who esteems too highly his own honour to allow it to be compromised by enterprises as devoid of utility as of grandeur. "It is with the most profound regret," he writes, "that the undersigned sees his hopes disappointed; and that he is obliged to declare that the arrangements put an end to by the allied Powers, and the opposition of the Greeks, taking from him the power to attain the sacred and glorious end in view, would impose on him a duty of a totally different nature,—that of a delegate of the allied Courts to hold the Greeks in subjection by force of arms. Such a mission would be as contrary to his sentiments and injurious to his

character, as it is directly opposed to the object of the treaty of the 6th of July, by which the three Powers agreed to unite their efforts in order to restore peace to the east of Europe. Therefore, the undersigned formally restores to the plenipotentiaries the trust of which circumstances will no longer permit him to take charge with honour to himself, nor with advantage to the Greeks, and the general interests of Europe."

Never, assuredly, has policy spoken a nobler language, and this would have been enough to command universal esteem, if Prince Leopold had not long before acquired it. An occasion soon presented itself of rewarding so much self-denial and greatness of mind. Belgium, having become mistress of her own destiny, after three centuries of foreign rule, sought for a king who, in the opinion of Europe, would be a sufficient guarantee for the new order of things, and whose personal influence was so considerable that it would enable him to remove difficulties, and to avoid dangers of all kinds, which inevitably occur immediately after a revolution; and no one but the Prince of Saxe-Coburg was equal to the accomplishment of such a task. The first overtures to attain this desirable end were made on the 22nd of April, 1831, by four Commissioners delegated by the National Congress,— Messrs. Henri de Brouckere, De Foere, Felix de Merode, and Hippolyte Vilain XIV., who waited upon Leopold at Marlborough House. The Prince, while testifying the liveliest sympathy for Belgium, and declaring "that his only ambition was to contribute to the happiness of his fellow-creatures," considered that he was unable, in the condition in which affairs then stood, to hold out any more definite hopes to the deputies. Many delicate questions, the most important among which undoubtedly was the demarcation of the frontiers of the new State, were at that time being discussed by the Conference of London; and the protocol

of the 20th of January, which refused to Belgium the sovereignty of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, caused among the Belgians the greatest indignation and opposition. Everything, therefore, counselled extreme reserve.

Nevertheless, on the 24th April, a second interview took place between the Prince and the Deputies of the National Congress. Leopold on that occasion particularly insisted on the definitive and irrevocable character of the protocol of the 20th January, and on the necessity, before any acceptance on his part, of a preliminary adhesion by the Congress to that diplomatic act. In a third interview, on the 30th of April, he still held the same language, and lengthened and earnest endeavours, joined to some fortunate modifications introduced in the decisions of the Conference, alone were able to overcome a resistance founded on the noblest and purest motives.

The National Congress having reassembled on the 21st May was immediately informed by M. Lebeau, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, of the more favourable disposition of the Great Powers towards Belgium, and of the excellent reception which they had given to the candidature of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. Therefore, on the 25th of May, ninety-five deputies, with M. Van de Weyer at their head, proposed to the Assembly to give to the Prince the title of King of the Belgians. The question of choosing a chief of the State, thus proposed, was entered in the orders of the day for the sitting of the 1st June, although it was not until the 3rd June that the discussion of the momentous question was commenced. On the following day, the 4th, a vote was taken by ballot, when a majority of 152, out of a total number of 196 voters, proclaimed His Royal Highness Prince Leopold-George-Christian-Frederick, Prince of Saxe-Coburg, King of the Belgians, on the condition of his accepting the constitution as it had been decreed by the National Congress.

Belgium and Europe know well with what loyal fidelity his oath has been kept.

It ought to be mentioned, in order to give its proper value to this manifestation of the national will, that the election of Prince Leopold was not, strictly speaking, opposed by any one. Out of the forty-four votes which were not recorded in his favour, M. Surlet de Chokier obtained fourteen; nineteen were those of absentees; one was set aside; and only ten were directly opposed to the choice of the majority; and even these were not hostile to the candidate, but simply to the territorial dismemberment which was then apprehended. It can therefore be affirmed, with historical truth, that King Leopold was, by the unanimous consent of the people, called to the throne which he afterwards occupied with so much splendour and true glory.

The decree of the Congress was delivered on the 27th June to the Prince, who was still at Marlborough House. Three days before that a draft of the preliminaries of peace, containing eighteen articles, had been determined upon between the Prince himself, Lord Palmerston, and the two Commissioners of the Regent, Messrs. Devaux and Nothomb. It was nine o'clock in the evening when the deputation from the Congress, presided over by M. de Gerlache, was ushered into the presence of Leopold, who replied in the following memorable terms to the communication which was made to him:—

"Gentlemen,—I am profoundly touched by the vote of which the Congress of Belgium has constituted you the interpreters. This mark of confidence is all the more flattering seeing that it was not sought for by me.

"Human destiny cannot afford a nobler and more useful task to any one than that of maintaining the independence of a nation, and consolidating its liberties. A mission of such high importance alone would determine me to quit an

independent position, and to separate myself from a country to which I have been attached by ties and memories of the most sacred nature, and which has given me so many proofs of its sympathy.

"I accept then, gentlemen, the offer which you make me, it being understood that the representatives of the nation in Congress will adopt measures which can alone establish the new State, and thereby assure to it the recognition of the European Powers.

"It is only by acting in this manner that the Congress will enable me, without the least difficulty, to devote myself entirely to Belgium, and to dedicate to her welfare and prosperity the relations which I have formed in countries whose friendship is essential to her, as well as to assure to her, as far as it will depend on my co-operation, an independent and happy existence."

The wise counsels of the Prince were appreciated in Belgium, and soon bore their proper fruit. On the 9th July, 1831, after long Parliamentary struggles, which had been preceded in the country by agitation of all kinds, the National Congress adopted, by a majority of 126 against 70 votes, the eighteen articles containing the preliminaries of peace. Immediately after this vote, which established and saved the State, the Assembly decreed that a deputation, formed by members of its own body, should be charged to announce to Prince Leopold the acceptance of the eighteen articles, and to accompany him to Belgium.

This deputation, consisting of Messrs. Lebeau, Felix de Merode, Fleussu, De Muelenaere, and Joseph d'Hooghvorst, set out from Brussels on the 10th July, was received by the Prince on the 12th, and quitted London with him on Saturday, the 16th July, at six o'clock in the morning. At three o'clock in the afternoon the deputation embarked on board the steamer "Crusader," and sailed for Calais, where

royal honours were paid to the new sovereign, who was complimented on landing, in the name of the King of the French, by General Count Belliard, peer of France, who had been appointed from that time to represent his country at the Court of independent Belgium.

On the morning of the 17th the King, with General Belliard by his side, started for Dunkirk, whence he soon reached the Belgian frontier. He was there received by a deputation sent by the Regent, among the members of which were M. de Sauvage, the Minister of the Interior, and the brave General de Wanthier, a veteran who had been in twenty battles, and who survives the sovereign whom he then welcomed in the name of the army. At Furnes, Ostend, Bruges, and Ghent the people gave the King a triumphal reception. "When one observed," says an historian, "all the cottages along the main road ornamented with evergreens and garlands, and the inhabitants animated by an artless and spontaneous joy hastening to the doors of their houses, it could well be said that the people instinctively understood the character of this inauguration. They felt that the Prince, the elect of the National Assembly, brought in his train prosperity, both public and private, confidence, peace, and security."

At half-past ten o'clock at night the King arrived at the castle of Laeken, where he was met by the Regent, the Ministers, and the officials of Congress, who were assembled to present their congratulations to him.

The installation of the King took place on the 21st July, a date hereafter memorable in our history, and solemnized at intervals of twenty-five years by memories which can never be effaced. We will not now describe, when Belgium is plunged into mourning, the splendours of a ceremony which awakened in the heart of a whole people the pride which they justly felt for their past glory. When the King, surrounded

by the people, took the oath to the constitution and the laws which emanated from the national sovereignty, all the world understood that the chain of our traditions had been renewed, and that ancient Belgium, democratic and commercial, had at length found a chief worthy of her. This was still better understood when the King, speaking from the height of the throne, whose steps he had for the first time ascended, made the following speech:—

"Gentlemen,

"The solemn act which has just been accomplished completes the social edifice that was begun by the patriotism of the nation and its representatives. The State is now definitively constituted according to the forms prescribed by the constitution.

"That constitution emanated entirely from you, a circumstance which, in the present position of the country, seems to me to be fortunate. It has rendered improbable the occurrence of collisions which might have arisen between different powers in the State, and impaired the harmony which ought to exist among them.

"The promptitude with which I repaired to Belgium ought to convince you that, faithful to my promises, I only awaited, before coming among you, the removal by your own hands of the obstacles which stood in the way of my accession to the throne.

"The various considerations insisted upon in the important discussion which brought about these results will form the object of my liveliest solicitude.

"I have received, from the moment of my arrival in Belgium, proofs of the most gratifying goodwill, which have filled me with as much emotion as gratitude. The appearance of the people, ratifying by their acclamations the act of the representatives of the nation, has convinced me that I

was chosen by the will of the country, and I know the duties which such a welcome imposes upon me.

"A Belgian by your adoption, I will also make it a rule to be one by my policy.

"I was also received with extreme goodwill in that part of the French territory which I traversed, and I thought I saw in those demonstrations, to which I attach a high value, the happy presage of relations of confidence and friendship which ought to exist between the two countries.

"The effect of all political commotion is temporarily to injure material interests. I understand their importance too well not to endeavour, with earnest solicitude, to relieve as speedily as possible commerce and industry, those vital principles of national prosperity. The relations which I have formed in the neighbouring countries will, I hope, second the efforts which I will incessantly make to attain that end; but I rejoice to believe that the Belgian people, so remarkable at once for good sense and resignation, will make allowance for the difficulties of a position, which is caused by the unsettled condition by which nearly the whole of Europe has been affected. I wish to surround myself with all the knowledge within my reach, to ascertain all the means of amelioration; and I desire, as I have already commenced, to collect on the spot the ideas which are most fitted to enlighten, in this respect, the policy of the government.

"Gentlemen, I have accepted the crown which you have offered to me only with a view to accomplish a task as noble as it will be advantageous, that of being called to consolidate the institutions of a generous people, and to maintain their independence. My sole ambition is to see you happy.

"I ought, at this affecting solemnity, to give expression to one of my most ardent wishes. The nation has just passed through a violent crisis: from this day may all hatreds be

forgotten, all resentments effaced; may one single thought animate all the Belgians, that of a frank and sincere union!

"I shall esteem myself happy to contribute to this joyful result, which has been so well prepared for by the wisdom of the venerable personage who has devoted himself with such a noble patriotism to the safety of his country.

"Gentlemen, I hope to be a guarantee of peace and tranquillity to Belgium, but the foresight of man is not infallible. If, however, notwithstanding all the sacrifices to maintain peace, we were threatened with war, I should not hesitate to appeal to the bravery of the Belgian people, and I hope that it would rally like one man round its chief in defence of the country and national independence."

It is fitting, at the close of a reign each day of which has been marked by a service rendered to the nation, to place once more before the eyes of the Belgian people this magnificent address, which contains the most perfect programme, and the most admirable profession of faith that has ever been made by a constitutional king. Just as Leopold showed himself in his first speech to the representatives of the Belgian people, such has he been during the whole of his life. His wisdom and perspicacity, which had foreseen everything, and measured everything, never for an instant forsook him; they have always been equal to his loyalty and honour. "My sole ambition," he said, "is to see you happy." This noble ambition has guarded, inspired, and sustained him during thirty-four years, in the midst of labours and trials of every kind; and it has been nobly recompensed! Before closing his eyes for ever, King Leopold had the satisfaction of looking into his inmost heart, and while casting a last glance upon a people whom he loved, whom he had made powerful and free, experiencing a feeling of inexpressible serenity spread over his soul; for he was able to carry

with him to the tomb the consciousness of having accomplished, without flagging, the greatest and the noblest task which it is possible for man to perform in this world.

From the 21st July, 1831, the history of King Leopold, by a most enviable privilege, is to be read in that of the Belgian people. To describe all that the country owes to the capacity, experience, and enlightened devotion of its sovereign, it would be necessary to re-write, from one end to the other, our contemporary annals. Called upon, almost on the morrow of his installation, to defend with the sword the country which henceforth placed all its hopes in him, he addressed the Belgians in the manly language of a prince accustomed to contend for the right, and deeply penetrated with the justice of his cause. At the head of an army, whose organization was far from being complete, and whose courage was not a sufficient compensation for its almost total want of discipline, the King, by his personal bravery, and his rare knowledge of military affairs, was enabled to save the honour of the Belgian flag in the midst of reverses, while contending against a force threefold greater than his own, and provided with all the resources of an excellent organization. Like an experienced chief, the King turned to our profit the experience which he had gained, and, thanks to his care and constant attention, the army of Belgium, entirely reorganized, soon became, as the King said, on opening the legislative session on the 8th September, "able to defend with honour and with success, the independence and the rights of the country."

When the adoption of the treaty, consisting of twenty-four articles, imposed upon defeated Belgium by the Conference of London, gave rise to the greatest agitation among the people, the King employed all his skill in calming the national indignation, while, at the same time, he made use of his personal influence with the Great Powers to dissuade

as much as possible, the adoption of any unusual or violent form in forcing the Belgians to accept a treaty, which was much less advantageous than that of the eighteen articles. And such was the confidence which the new sovereign already inspired among the people, that he partly succeeded in making them forget the offence which the conditions imposed could not fail to give to the national pride.

Having been definitely admitted, after 1839, into the great family of nations, Belgium sought, in the expansion of her interior resources, that prosperity and glory which the smallness of her territory, together also with her best interests, would not allow her to obtain by other means, which may be more splendid perhaps, but are certainly more dangerous. Leopold applied himself to this second part of his task with as much ardour as he had displayed in accomplishing the first part. Having made himself master in advance of every useful idea, he became the indefatigable promoter and protector of everything which could contribute to the intellectual and material progress of his people. In the domain of politics, he manifested the same superiority in putting into practice on the throne, with a prudence, an impartiality, and a sagacity which never failed him, the true priciples of constitutional government; and in conforming himself, in all his acts of sovereign authority, to the wishes legally made known by the country. Thus, in 1847, when the first symptoms appeared of that revolutionary tempest which strewed Europe with the *débris* of thrones, happy Belgium, protected by the wisdom of her king, saw the storm die away at her frontiers. And in 1848, on the very day that Louis-Philippe quitted the Tuileries, Leopold I. signed a decree instituting a special decoration as a reward for the labouring classes.

We may well recall that time with pride: we then afforded the world a great example. The people of the small but

prosperous state of Belgium, animated by good sense and gratitude, remained perfectly calm, though surrounded by the revolutionary mania which pressed upon them from all sides. In the midst of Europe, shaken to its foundations, they remained masters of themselves, and quietly regarded the sad spectacle which was offered to them by other nations. At that momentous period, reviewing her past career, attentively considering the eighteen years of peace, order, and liberty which separated her from the time when she re-conquered her independence, Belgium measured the extent of her felicity, and estimated the debt which she owed to the prince who had conferred upon her all these benefits; and who, strong in his fidelity to the oath which he had taken, now declared that he did not wish to hold his crown but with the consent of the people. A long, loud cry of affection and enthusiasm, resounding from one end of the country to the other, was the response that was made to this sublime example of self-denial; so that 1848 was for King Leopold a new election, decided this time, not by the representatives of the nation, but directly by the entire people. The people and the dynasty mingled together in one common embrace, and sealed with transport the agreement which united their destinies for ever. To complete the demonstration, it was only necessary that these sincere and affectionate testimonies of respect, these bursts of patriotism, should be manifested by some formal ceremony. Such an opportunity was presented on the occasion of celebrating the annual *fêtes* of September. People from all parts of the country repaired to Brussels to do honour to the sovereign, and on his part, the King, when presenting colours to the Civic Guard, indicated by a few words, which history has preserved, the high political importance of the manifestation in which the whole nation then joined. "Gentlemen," he said, to the superior officers of the citizen militia assembled before him,

—"I feel a lively emotion, but also a legitimate pride, in addressing to you these words. This fine country, the seat of the most ancient civilization, had long hoped for a separate existence—a national existence; but alas! her wishes have often been disappointed, and her destiny subordinated to interests which were foreign to her. At length, for the last eighteen years, you have succeeded in enjoying that existence so often wished for. For the first time you belong to yourselves.

"Of this independent existence you have made a noble and patriotic use, and thereby powerfully strengthened it. While in this condition, a political crisis, unparalleled in history, occurred. Up to the present moment you have gloriously passed through it — so gloriously that many countries have adopted your political organization as their model; while your name is everywhere honoured and respected, and you can justly feel that it deserves to be.

"Let us maintain this noble position; let us continue to progress as we have done up to the present time. And thus we shall assure for ourselves an enviable name in history, and a glorious future."

Such noble language, as it deserved, was soon known everywhere. Aggrandized in her own eyes, as well as in those of Europe, Belgium, under the guidance of her illustrious chief, reaped the advantages, one after the other, and by the unanimous consent of her people, of many improvements which were elsewhere vainly sought for by violent means. The popularity of the King still increased, as well as the deep affection which the nation had vowed to him. This was clearly evinced when, on the 11th October, 1850, death cut short the days of a much-loved queen. A national mourning proved that the terrible blow which the King had suffered was also felt in the hearts of the people. The profound sorrow displayed on the occasion, accorded not only

with our gratitude, but was also due to the loss of so many virtues.

Three years later the wise prevision of King Leopold still further secured the duration of the national dynasty by giving as a consort to the heir to the throne the august princess who has succeeded Queen Louisa-Maria in the affection of all the Belgians; when the country showed itself not less prompt to partake of the legitimate joy of the monarch than it had previously been to share his sorrow. The entry of the Archduchess Maria-Henrietta into Belgium was literally a triumphal march, and the splendid *fêtes* given to the young couple by all the great towns in the country, testified to the joy which this happy marriage inspired, and the gratitude that was felt at the never-ceasing forethought of the King.

Not long afterwards, Belgium declared the measure of its attachment to the King by awarding him a triumph unparalleled in the history of any people. On the 21st July, 1856, a quarter of a century had elapsed since the day on which Leopold of Saxe-Coburg had received the crown from the hands of Congress; and the Chambers, the Government, and the whole country, under the influence of the same feeling, resolved to celebrate in a befitting manner that memorable anniversary. What spectacle could be more worthy of admiration in this old Europe, torn by strife between royal ambition and popular fury? A king an honest man, who had considered it his highest glory to observe his oath, to devote himself during a period of twenty-five years to the happiness of his people; a people sufficiently intelligent to appreciate its happiness, and sufficiently honest to attribute all the honour of such a noble result to the King, who possessed the high faculty of judging of the future by the experience of the past,—it was reserved for the reign of Leopold I. to afford the brightest illustration of such a marvel! We

need not here describe the splendid *fêtes* of which Brussels was then the scene; every one must remember them; but in this hour of grief and mourning we may well repeat the solemn words which were addressed by the old President of the National Congress, in the name of sixty-five of his surviving colleagues, to his Majesty the King when he entered the capital by the same road which he had traversed twenty-five years before, surrounded by immense multitudes that arrested his progress at every step. It was a moment which gave rise to the deepest emotion in the breasts of all who entertain sentiments of honour and probity conjoined with the purest love of country, when the venerable founders of our independence approached to render testimony to the King of the religious manner in which he had observed his oath.

"Sire," said the Baron de Gerlache, "twenty-five years ago, in this very place, on this same day, the Belgian Congress received, in the name of the nation, the oath of your Majesty to observe the Constitution and the laws of the people of Belgium, and to maintain the national independence. The same men who were then witnesses of that solemn engagement now come to affirm, in the face of Heaven, that your Majesty has fulfilled all your promises, and surpassed all our hopes; and the whole nation, Sire, affirms the same thing with us. It attests that, 'during a reign of twenty-five years, its King has not violated a single one of its laws, nor made an attempt upon any one of its liberties, nor given a legitimate cause of complaint to a single one of our fellow-citizens. Upon this point all differences of opinion disappear; upon this point we are all of one accord; we have all but one heart wherewith to associate in one common love both our King and our country.

"Your presence here, Sire, recalls to our memory that great day in July, 1831, which no demonstration can fully

equal; when our hearts, excited by the liveliest joy and hope, saluted in Leopold I. the dawn of a new era for Belgium, which at length awakened, after slumbering for two long centuries under a foreign rule. The same rejoicings have ushered in this day in every one of our towns, for this *fête* derived its origin entirely from the people. Yes, Sire, it is the expression of the popular mind, which feels desirous of pouring out all its gratitude to him who, next to God, has most contributed to make the people happy."

The whole of Europe attentively watched and feelingly applauded these demonstrations of the 21st July, 1856, which increased the reputation that Belgium enjoyed abroad, as well as the great renown for wisdom and ability which our beloved King already possessed. He was no longer regarded as the happy and respected chief of a small country, but was placed by general consent in the first rank of those Arbiters of Nations, those rare and profound men who leave behind them a luminous track in the history of their times. Possessed of universal esteem as well as of the confidence of the crowned heads of Europe, the illustrious inhabitant of the castle of Laeken became in turn the counsellor of all his royal brethren, and we shall one day know how many dangers and disasters his wise advice has spared the world.

Other *fêtes*, less gorgeous it is true, but not less significant, soon followed those of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the King's reign. In September, 1859, on the inauguration of the column dedicated to the National Congress, and at the top of which is the statue of Leopold I., the representatives of the nation renewed once more the solemn homage rendered to the Prince to whom Belgium owed twenty-eight years of unexampled prosperity. "Where in Europe can be found," said M. Orts, President of the Chamber of Representatives, "a monument erected as this is by the gratitude or the people in memory of the liberties we have enjoyed

during a third of a century." Where shall we find a people and their King, after twenty-eight years of public life, mingling together in the name of the Constitution which they had at the commencement sworn to observe, and exclaiming, with legitimate pride, "We, King and People, have faithfully kept the oath to which we swore!"

In the following year, the anniversary of the 21st July furnished occasion for another demonstration of love and patriotism. Some French newspapers, holding opinions which were emphatically condemned by the honesty and loyalty of the country in which they were published, had the hardihood to assert that Belgium was willing to be annexed, and this, too, at a moment when she was preparing to celebrate, together with the anniversary of her well-beloved sovereign, one of the greatest economic reforms which had taken place since 1830, the abolition throughout the country of town-dues. Public opinion, roused to a high degree of indignation, was powerfully expressed by an ovation given to the King by the capital and all the towns of the country. On the 8th July the King made himself the interpreter of the sentiments which agitated the whole nation in a speech addressed to the magistrates of Ghent,—a speech which, both in thought and form, is worthy to be recorded by history.

"I am deeply moved," said his Majesty, "by the affectionate sentiments which you have expressed towards me. The place in which we are assembled recalls the measures of ancient and glorious times. These old corporations were the seats of commerce, of industry, and the arts, when a great part of Europe still lay buried in darkness. From the most distant ages, the love of country and of independence had been preserved as a sacred fire in the hearts of their inhabitants. The most precious of blood was often shed to obtain a free and national existence. Success, however, did

not crown those noble efforts. But it has been reserved for us to establish, on the surest foundations, that which the country had so earnestly desired, and to obtain for her the happiest social and political existence that can possibly be conceived.

"Such was our condition when the storm arose which committed such destruction in Europe in 1848, when we alone, to our glory, escaped all its dangers. Our political existence remained secure against all attack.

"Whatever trials may be in store for us in future, 1848 clearly shows us how we may pass through them with honour. Two generations of my family have been born among you and claim with you a common country. My devotion to you during a long reign is well known, and as long as it shall please Providence to preserve me, I will remain faithful to my duty, and unchangeable in my paternal affection towards you."

These noble words were received with the greatest enthusiasm by the whole country. All the organized bodies in the State, the provincial and municipal councils, and other associations of a private and independent character, which in their free and liberal institutions faithfully represent our national character, voted addresses by acclamatior to the King, in order to express their unalterable devotion to his dynasty and national independence. The Legislative Chambers joined in this spontaneous and unanimous feeling, and on the 17th July, M. Orts, the President of the Chamber of Representatives, opened the session by addressing to the members the following words, which were most rapturously applauded:—

"Gentlemen, certain attacks, which are as devoid of foundation as they are culpable, have caused our provincial councils to manifest more energetically than ever the sentiments which the country entertains towards the King and

the independence of the nation. I emphatically say, so that all may understand, that these sentiments, which are respected abroad, are in Belgium unanimous and unalterable."

As a proof of the reality of these patriotic manfestations, a French journal having gone so far as to say that all this enthusiasm was enacted by order, the people of Brussels took it upon themselves to contradict such a calumny, by affixing to the following address twenty-five thousand signatures:—

"Sire,—While congratulating your Majesty on the twenty-ninth anniversary of your glorious reign, the typographers and workmen of Brussels desire to express their unalterable devotion to your throne and the liberal institutions which have been established in Belgium.

"Sire,—The Belgian people have been said to entertain anti-national tendencies, which they solemnly repudiate. The working classes know the price which has been paid for the independence of their country, and, firmly convinced of their rights and the sacredness of their cause, they desire on this memorable day to renew to your Majesty the sentiments which animate them towards your august family."

On the 21st July, the army, the civic guard, and the working classes, who had requested and obtained a holiday for the occasion, defiled in immense masses before the King, who was completely surrounded by the people, exclaiming, thousand-tongued, "Long live the King! National independence for ever!" When the head of the popular column approached His Majesty, a workman stepped forward, and placing in the King's hand the address which we have given above: "Sire," said he, "I present to your Majesty the address of the working classes of Brussels. When danger approaches the people will always surround you." "My heart and its best wishes have always been with the working

classes," the King replied; and the column passed by amidst the loudest shouts. "Even at the official reception," says an historical account, "etiquette was forgotten, and the most enthusiastic reception was given to the King. Not a person but wore the national colours. The Duchess of Brabant herself, fitly representing the popular sentiment, appeared on a balcony attired in a tri-coloured dress, in order to present her son, the young Count Hainault, to the enthusiastic and excited crowd. Wherever the King appeared, the army, the civic guard, and the populace cheered vociferously."

The following instance, and it is the last we shall give, will prove how far the enthusiasm of the capital expressed the feeling of all classes of citizens. When the people were defiling before the palace, the senior Curate of Huy spoke as follows from the pulpit:—

"When the people of Belgium arise like one man to testify their regard for the King, and to express their unalterable determination to preserve their liberties, it is the duty of the clergy to do likewise, and to manifest in the most solemn manner their devotion to the King, and their inviolable attachment to the constitution under which they live.

"It is now twenty-nine years since Leopold, responding to our wishes, arrived in Belgium, and took the oath to the Constitution which was framed by the National Congress. And now, under the irresistible influence of gratitude and patriotism, in the face of Europe, and before these altars, let us proclaim with one voice:—He has observed his oath; he has not obliterated from our charter one of our liberties. Faithful to his promises, he has been not only the King, but the Father, of his people. Let us all declare, priests, people, soldiers, officials, manufactures, magistrates,—let us all determine to dedicate to the defence of the throne, under the protection of which we are free and happy, our

hearts and lives; and if there should be traitors to our country, let it be known that they are not to be found in our midst."

But the time approached when all this joy and enthusiasm were to give place to anxiety and alarm. Cherished by his people, revered by the whole of Europe, who recognized in him the wisest of kings, chosen as arbiter in various international differences, Leopold had reached the highest pinnacle of human glory; but the love of his people and the respect of other nations could not preserve him from the ills to which flesh is heir. In the month of April, 1862, he was first attacked by the painful malady which eventually caused his death, and in a few weeks the disease made such rapid progress, that the greatest fear was entertained for his Majesty. The whole country was deeply moved, and everywhere the sincerest affection was manifested. Bulletins were anxiously looked for and eagerly perused: it seemed as if every one was about to lose a beloved father. Thanks to science, however, aided by the robust constitution, and especially by the indomitable spirit of the august patient, a cure was effected, and Belgium yet hoped that a long life would be reserved for its beloved King. And when, completely recovered, he made known his intention of paying a visit to Brussels during the anniversary of September, another of those *fêtes* occurred which illustrate a reign and make it memorable for ever. On the morning of the 24th September, 1862, the people and the civic guard—the King had expressed a desire that the constituted authorities should appear as little as possible on the occasion—assembled in dense masses, and were so orderly that the presence of a policeman was hardly required, along the route by which his Majesty was to arrive from Laeken. When the King's carriage appeared from the Allée-Verte, and came out on the line of the

Boulevards, a scene took place which is perfectly indescribable. The populace, who had entire possession of the public way, surrounded the royal carriage, and even pressed under the horses' feet, shouting most enthusiastically. Working men, under the influence of the simplest yet purest affection, and, regardless of ceremony, got on the step of the King's carriage, and in their rough but honest fashion shook hands with his Majesty, who smiled and wept with joy. The two princes, in the next carriage, shared the emotion of their august parent, and this extraordinary scene taught them how to love more deeply than ever the honest and devoted people, who thus acknowledged with so much respect and love the good faith which their sovereign had always observed towards them.

But, though once conquered, the disease had not forsaken its victim. Nevertheless, for two years more, it appeared as if the King had regained the strength of a vigorous old age, when, at the beginning of 1865, fresh symptoms once more alarmed his people. It was after a journey to England, undertaken in the month of March, that the state of the King's health again gave rise to apprehension. The vital force, however, and the remarkable energy which characterized Leopold, enabled him a second time to overcome his sufferings, and restored him to health; but an excursion to Ardennes, at the commencement of November, brought on a relapse, and put an end to the life for which Belgium now mourns. Still, to the last day, Leopold performed his duties as a king; and it can be said, that even on his death-bed he attended to public affairs, watching over all with that wonderful good sense and firmness of mind, for which he was distinguished during the whole of his reign.

On the 10th of December, about midnight, the Ministers repaired to the palace of Laeken; but upon their arrival the

august patient had just fallen asleep. This was a gain of some hours, but there was no hope. It was, and could only be, but a short respite.

For several days past the Duke and Duchess of Brabant, their children, and the Count of Flanders had taken up their residence in the palace. The King, who saw them often, summoned them to his presence on the morning of the 11th, and begged them not to leave him until all was over.

His Majesty, who preserved up to the last moment all the faculties of his vast and noble intelligence, was perfectly calm and tranquil. The audible and heavy respiration alone indicated the approach of the last moment. The King, besides, no longer entertained any doubt upon the danger of his condition.

About 11 o'clock the President of the Senate, the President of the Chamber of Representatives, and the Ministers, again proceeded to Laeken. M. Jules van Praet, Minister of the King's Household, his oldest friend in Belgium, his most intimate confidant and most devoted servant, also accompanied them. When these high functionaries were introduced into the chamber of the august sufferer, a most noble and touching spectacle was presented to them.

The King still preserved all his consciousness. He was surrounded by his children and grandchilden bathed in tears, and held one of the hands of the Duchess of Brabant, who knelt at the foot of the bed.

The Rev. Dr. Becker, his Majesty's chaplain, who for the last few days has also resided at Laeken, was also in the royal chamber.

Perceiving his old friend M. Jules Van Praet, the King took his hand and grasped it affectionately. His Majesty then replaced his hand in that of the Duchess.

Some minutes after, the King expired gently, without a murmur and without agony, so imperceptibly that the per-

sons surrounding his bedside were not immediately aware that he had breathed his last.

The tomb has at length closed over all that was mortal of the first King of the Belgians, who was attended to his last resting-place by all the most cherished affections of the country. We can only bemoan our loss, and deeply regret that nothing now remains of so much wisdom, honour, and glory, but the imperishable memory of the venerated King. But that memory and the many noble examples he left us should teach the country what a debt of gratitude we owe him, and how we can best do honour to his name. During thirty-five years of his life Leopold I. had but one thought; namely, to assure, by unceasing watchfulness and the most earnest solicitude, the independence of Belgium, his adopted country, which he was proud of showing to the world as an example of what liberty can accomplish, when the people know and perform their duty. This work, which was so dear to his heart, he has bequeathed to us as well as to his son, with pious injunctions to continue and perfect it, and we shall know how to prove ourselves equal to so noble a task.

Nations are the arbiters of their own destinies. The experience which we have enjoyed of the advantages of constitutional liberty, and the inestimable price which Belgium attaches to that independence, so long hoped for and at length definitively acquired, impose upon all of us, in our respective spheres, duties which will not be forgotten. Europe may be assured that the Belgium of 1865 will prove itself worthy of the Belgium of 1830. In the presence of the late King's tomb, towards which not a complaint nor a reproach is directed, of that venerated tomb upon which a whole people shower down their benedictions and their tears, we will gather round the well-beloved Prince who, a Belgian at heart as well as by birth, has succeeded amid universal re-

spect and acclamations to the glorious heritage which his father has left him. Confident and strong in its liberty, and happy in its popular dynasty, Belgium may without fear indulge a manly grief, for the future is before her. That future, Belgium can calmly gaze at with hope and good faith, and trusting in herself and to the sympathy of all civilized nations, she with one voice decrees to Leopold I. the illustrious cognomen of *Father of his Country.*

THE END.

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